



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Early to Rise

*School Start Times for Middle School and High School Students – United States, 2011-12
School Year*

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Getting enough sleep is important for the development of young bodies and minds. Unfortunately, because of early school start times, many students aren't getting enough rest before classes.

Dr. Anne Wheaton is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the importance of students getting enough sleep before school. Welcome to the show, Anne.

[Dr. Wheaton] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Anne, how much rest do young people need each day?

[Dr. Wheaton] High school students need at least eight hours of sleep per night, although many teens may need nine or even 10 hours. Younger middle school students need even more sleep. We've seen that two-thirds of high school students get less than eight hours of sleep per night during the school week. And it's not just that adolescents need more sleep than adults. Most parents of teens have probably noticed that their children tend to fall asleep later and have a harder time waking up than they used to and this is not just a result of changing lifestyle, it's a result of biological changes that occur during puberty. The shift in sleep timing is actually one of the early signs of puberty.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some negative aspects of getting too little sleep?

[Dr. Wheaton] Insufficient sleep is a significant issue and contributes to a lot of problems of adolescents. Among adolescents, not getting enough sleep is associated with poor health, risky behaviors, and poor academic performance. More specifically, adolescents who don't get enough sleep are more likely to be overweight; not get enough physical activity; suffer from depressive symptoms, such as suicidal thoughts; and engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as drinking, smoking, and using illegal drugs.

[Dr. Gaynes] Anne, at what time do classes begin in most schools in the U.S.?

[Dr. Wheaton] The average start time for middle and high schools in the United States is just after 8:00 AM. But even more importantly is that five out of six of these schools start before 8:30 AM and that's the time that was recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

[Dr. Gaynes] Who determines school start times?

[Dr. Wheaton] School start times are set locally, often at the school district level, but sometimes by the administration of individual schools. So the first step in trying to delay start times in your neighborhood schools is to identify who makes this decision.

[Dr. Gaynes] What can parents do to help their children get enough sleep before school?

[Dr. Wheaton] Parents can work to convince their local school board to delay school start times and this involves becoming familiar with the research into the benefits of changing start times, but also working together with other groups that would also be impacted by a change in the start times. This includes teachers, students and their families, but also people involved in after school programs or transportation. There may be some resistance at first but many schools have managed to successfully delay school start times and seen benefits to those students, such as improved grades, improved mood, and less drowsy driving. And having a later school start time doesn't mean that students will automatically get more sleep. Parents also play an important role in establishing good sleep habits in their children. Keeping a consistent bedtime and wake time, including on the weekends, is very important, as is a good sleep environment. This means a bedroom that's dark, quiet, and cool. And especially relevant to middle and high school students is limiting the use of electronics in the bedroom. Having a mobile phone or computer in the bedroom makes it more difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep through the night. Parents can also be good examples and show that they understand the importance of sleep to everyone's health, safety, and performance, whether it's at school or at work.

[Dr. Gaynes] Anne, where can listeners get more information about sufficient sleep requirements?

[Dr. Wheaton] Listeners can go to sleepfoundation.org, sleepfoundation is all one word, and search for "teens."

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Anne. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Anne Wheaton about the importance of students getting enough sleep. Individual school systems should consider setting school start times as late as possible to allow students more time for sleep. Meanwhile, parents should help their children keep a consistent sleep schedule and limit access to electronics in the evening.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.